

Frank Starr

Secret Memos Offer Little Against Nixon



WASHINGTON—Unless there is more that inexplicably is being held back, the secret memos on policy discussions during the India-Pakistan war make one wonder why Nixon critics felt compelled to publish them, particularly when the most damaging passages were largely ignored.

In a quiet period, they provided something readable for those who have little else to do and who are entertained by the character of discussion that lead to policy decisions.

The accounts of three consecutive meetings of the Washington special action group held in the White House Situation Room, plus the memo filed by Ambassador Kenneth Keating from New Delhi, proved:

• That as the India-Pakistan fighting went into high gear, the President's sympathies tilted heavily in favor of Pakistan.

• That despite the United States' official statement of neutrality, this tilt was deliberately reflected in statements and actions mapped out by U. S. policy-makers.

• That the policymakers were guided and led by the President's chief foreign affairs adviser, Henry Kissinger, not the secretary of state, William P. Rogers.

• That when decisions were considered regarding U. S. policy vis-a-vis India and Pakistan, consideration also was given to what the public should be told.

• That in order to assist the U. S. ally in the conflict, someone went so far as to suggest a quiet, clandestine supply of arms, despite an official embargo.

Now, whether one accepts and agrees with those situations or not, all of them, with the possible exception of the last, should be no surprise to anyone who reads newspapers regularly.

Missing the Point

The secret memos were uncovered by

syndicated columnist Jack Anderson. His objective in printing them — to compare the tilt against India with a public denial by Kissinger that the administration was anti-Indian and thus prove that the administration was lying — misses the point.

This reporter was only one of many who at the time noted that the United States' proclaimed neutrality had been abandoned in favor of Pakistan. That was no secret, but that was and is a far cry from being "anti-Indian."

The most damaging content of the documents marked "Secret-Sensitive" was not in the oft-quoted comment that Kissinger was "getting hell every half hour from the President" but in the discussions of what the public should be told about aid decisions.

Kissinger, when asked how to explain the withholding of aid to India, responded: "If asked, we can say we are reviewing our whole economic program and that the granting of fresh aid is being suspended in view of conditions on the subcontinent." That was hardly the truth.

On possible Pakistani requests for military equipment, blocked by legislative decision, Kissinger said the President "may want to honor those requests," and David Packard, then

Bob Wiedrich is on vacation. His Tower Ticker column will be resumed when he returns.

assistant secretary of defense, and Joseph Sisco, assistant secretary of state, agreed to study what might be done. Sisco warned that it must be done "very quietly."

On the Plus Side . . .

With those minuses in mind and without excusing them, the balance sheet shows some interesting pluses, altho not ones that need be particularly surprising—only somewhat reassuring:

• That in seeking to assess a developing situation, there was a calm and intelligent discussion aimed at consideration of all the pertinent circumstances, with Kissinger asking all the right questions.

• That the group recognized in advance that the United Nations' effort to block military action was likely to be futile but it must be attempted, and that the fall of East Pakistan was a question only of days.

• That consideration was given early to the problem of the diplomatic position Washington would take with regard to the new nation of Bangla Desh.

• That consideration was given to the possibility of a bloodbath in Bangla Desh following the war and to ways in which it could be avoided.

• That, as in the case of the Pentagon Papers' revelations on Viet Nam, the CIA displayed an astonishing degree of accuracy in its assessment and predictions.

As the blocking of diplomatic action in the U. N. long enough for a strong military position to be established was foreseen, so also was the outcome of the war.

But there is nothing yet to support Anderson's charge that the government policy drove India into the arms of the Soviet Union, with which it had signed a treaty last summer.

The Indian decision to upgrade its diplomatic relations with Hanoi and the U. S. decision, announced a day earlier, to develop a regular naval presence in the Indian Ocean are concrete signs of an unfavorable shift in U. S.-India relations.

But it is far too simple to suggest that all of this results only from Nixon's righteous indignation at the Indian attack on Pakistan.

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